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SIPDIS

NEA/MAG (PATTERSON/HAYES); DRL (JOHNSTONE/KLARMAN)
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2019
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KDEM KPAO TS
SUBJECT: GOT IMPEDES TUNISIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LEAGUE MEETING

REF: A. TUNIS 49
B. 08 TUNIS 39

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) On January 23, the GOT prevented Abdelhamid Amine, Secretary General of the newly formed Organization for Coordination between Human Rights Leagues in the Maghreb from entering Tunisia. The following day, security forces blocked the meeting Amine had been invited to attend with the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH). The LTDH was attempting to operate despite a longstanding de facto ban on its activities (Ref B). Though the LTDH was allowed to participate in demonstrations protesting the violence in Gaza (Ref A), the events of January 24 indicate that the GOT is not prepared to allow the LTDH to resume normal operations.
End Summary.

Once Upon A Time...

12. (C) The Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) is the Arab world's oldest human rights organization. A suit filed in 2000 by dissident LTDH members (widely believed to be backed by the GOT) culminated in a 2006 court decision that virtually suspended all LTDH activities. In separate rulings, Tunisian courts banned the LTDH from all activities other than preparing for a new Congress, but also banned the LTDH from holding its Congress. The two sides of the dispute differ on several points, including the political independence of the LTDH, the circumstances under which its 2000 Congress was held, and the post-Congress consolidation of LTDH chapters.

13. (C) The LTDH has attempted to circumvent the de facto ban on its activities several times, but meetings other than those of the steering committee usually have been blocked by security forces. In mid-January, however, the LTDH was allowed to participate in demonstrations protesting the violence in Gaza (Ref B). Shortly afterwards on January 24, the LTDH attempted to organize a meeting to discuss a new alliance between human rights leagues in the Maghreb at the headquarters of the Tunisian Women's Association for Research and Development (AFTURD). According to the LTDH, an official from the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) contacted AFTURD leaders, telling them that they were not allowed to host the LTDH meeting. The LTDH tried to move the meeting to its own headquarters, but security forces prevented the guests, including journalists, civil society leaders, and diplomats from Maghreb countries, from attending. Among those refused entry was Mohamed Ismail, from the Algerian human rights league. Only members of the LTDH steering committee were

allowed to enter.

¶4. (C) On January 23, GOT officials prevented Abdelhamid Amine, Secretary General of the Organization for Coordination between Human Rights Leagues in the Maghreb (CMODH), from entering Tunisia. The LTDH had organized the January 24 meeting with the intention of discussing the CMODH, and Amine was to have been a guest. In his open letter to President Ben Ali protesting the GOT decision, Amine called his exclusion arbitrary, and noted that he was not given a reason or explanation when he was denied entry. He also said that airport officials threatened to make him re-board his flight by force if he did not cooperate. The GOT has not issued a response and local media have not reported the incident.

Comment

¶5. (C) The GOT's actions to block the LTDH meeting and deny Amine entry to Tunisia are unfortunate. There is no sign of any let up of GOT pressure on the LTDH. End Comment.
Godec